BOOKING IT: READING BEHAVIOR IN THE LITERATE LIVES OF MIDDLE SCHOOLERS

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this research is to observe the reading behaviors and book choices present among bilingual fifth-graders in a charter school classroom in Austin, Texas. There is an abundance of research on reader identity, as well as bilingual language development, but much remains to be known about how these two entities interact with each other. The goal of this project is to shed light on a new population; namely, bilingual charter school middle schoolers. By examining how bilingual middle schoolers construct their own reading identities and pursue literacies of their choice in the classroom, my goal is to better equip future educators with the skills to make their students successful readers and thinkers.

Creating a body of confident and passionate readers that also happen to be bilingual is both important from a personal, as well as political, standpoint. Bilingual students represent a booming population in Texas and across the United States, and yet one that is underrepresented in the field of literacy studies. In order to better serve the needs of these students as educators in Texas, it is important to consider the factors that inform reader behavior. This thesis is broken up into a literature review where I outline the research that has contextualized and guided my project. Next I list my own methodology for this project and detail my classroom observations in order to convey what exactly I saw when I spent time in the classroom. After this, I synthesize my observations into findings. My thesis finishes with these findings and their implications.

The results of my study can help to better inform English language instruction practices as it relates to reading and book choice. My research found that reader behavior plays a large role in adolescent identity construction, and in turn, adolescent identity affects reading choice and reading behavior. My data supports the belief that with the proper amount of guidance and positive framing, reading can be an accessible and pleasurable activity for all students.

To Mom and Dad:

Who have given me everything and asked for nothing in return;

You both will—and always will be—my reasons for everything I do.

—OB

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Finally, I want to thank my parents, Katherine and Tony Berkeley. Their constant and unwavering support and encouragement throughout my entire life is why I am here today. It seems fitting that as I end this chapter of my life and start a new one, I have this tangible piece of evidence that proves what my parents' devotion and love has done for me. This work is for them. They have been my greatest teachers in life and I am so thankful for them.

So thank you all—even though "thank you" doesn't even begin to cover it.

“You have to carry the fire.
I don't know how to.
Yes, you do.
Is the fire real? The fire?
Yes it is.
Where is it? I don't know where it is.
Yes you do. It's inside you. It always was there. I can see it.”

—Cormac McCarthy, *The Road*

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Chapter 1: Introduction

On my first day in the classroom conducting observations for this project, I noticed something I hadn't expected to see. I saw a unique microcosm wherein literate activities were pursued and explored. Students had "free-reading" books that immediately shed light on the type of readers they were and their trajectories into the literate world. Students shared book recommendations with friends and in turn, influenced each other's literacy choices. And yet, independent reading still remained a deeply personal activity. The layers of interaction and meaning all operating under the umbrella of literacy that I observed on that first day instantly became of great interest to me. As I watched my classroom teacher help her students pick new books, explore different authors, and learn about what being a motivated and self-aware reader means, it became clear that the art of book choice was much more purposeful than it was random. The concepts of book choice and reader identity were known to me, but I had not seen them in action. The minute I did, though, I knew it was the direction I wanted to take my research for this project in.

My observations were at Progress Charter (a pseudonym) because I believe strongly in their methodology and the population—predominantly African American and Hispanic students—it serves. From the minute I set foot in the classroom, I noticed a distinct relationship between the students and their choice of reading books. I knew that the relationship between the students in this classroom and the books they chose to read would shed more light on them as readers and learners than a test score ever could.

Bilingual students represent a booming population in Texas and across the United States, and yet one that is underrepresented in the field of literacy studies. There is ample research on reader identity, as well as bilingual language development, but the intersection between the two still remains largely unexplored. Creating a body of confident and passionate readers that are also bilingual is of great interest to me, especially as a future teacher in the state of Texas.

The goal of this project is to shed light on a new population; namely, bilingual middle schoolers. My thesis looks at a local charter school's fifth grade class and the interaction that exists between student bilingualism, reading behavior/identity, and book choice.

By examining how bilingual middle schoolers construct their own reading identities and pursue literacies in classroom and home settings, I hope to be able to better equip future educators with the skills to make their students successful readers and thinkers.

Chapter 2: Background Information and Review of Literature

Biliteracy

Biliteracy is defined as "any and all instances in which communication occurs in two (or more) languages in or around writing" (Hornberger, 1990). This definition follows from Shirley Brice Heath's definition of literacy events as "occasions in which written language is integral to the nature of participants' interactions and their interpretive processes and strategies" (Heath, 1982). The definition of biliteracy varies from person to person, but in general, it concerns the mastery (or some variation of it) of reading…in two or more languages. In addition to comprehending, speaking, reading, and writing, biliteracy includes constructing meaning by

making relevant cultural and linguistic connections with print and learners' lived experiences, and manipulating the two linguistic systems to make meaning (Reyes, 2001).

Biliteracy is "a complex phenomenon with cognitive, sociocultural, and sociological dimensions" (Gort, 2012). Emergent bilinguals have the potential to develop literacy in two languages in supportive contexts that include the classroom, home, and community. For children from homes where English isn't the primary language spoken, reading and writing may be learned in the non-English language first. Literacy practices in English are introduced second. This can be a successful route to biliteracy only if the "non-English language continues to be promoted and developed to high degrees, and not abandoned before it is fully developed, once English is introduced" (Gort, 2012). The diversity in literacy behaviors that students display as they become biliterate suggests the context as well as personal characteristics play an important role in this process (Gort, 2012).

Biliteracy is important to consider in the context of this research because many of the students at Progress Charter are bilingual. They bring multiple linguistic abilities to the classroom each and every day because they come from homes where English may not be the primary language spoken. Understanding biliteracy depends on honoring the distinction between the different languages spoken by students and in what contexts they choose to use them. There is often a contrast between students' school and non-school engagements, which "demonstrates why a focus on multiplicity of literacies and literate behaviors across contexts is important in understanding young people's actions and development" (Ek, Machado-Casas, et. al, 2011). Traditionally, literacy has been associated with schooling. When the concept of what literacy can consist of is widened, however, literacy and literate activities, homes, communities, and

workplaces become sites for literacy use (Schultz and Hull, 2002). To talk about literacy these days “both in school and out, is to speak of events, practices, activities, ideologies, discourses, and identities” (Schultz and Hull, 2002).

Student Reading Life

I. Attitudes Towards Literacy and Books

A fairly comprehensive study of adults indicated that most read for knowledge or for pleasure ("The Consumer Study on Reading and Book Purchasing,” 1978). Much less is known about children's reasons for reading, however (Ngandu, 1981). In a study on motivation for student reading, Ngandu found that 26% of surveyed students read for survival, 37% for knowledge, 11% for personal development, 13% for pleasure, 4% for shared experience, and 9% for no value identified. Ngandu also compared survey results from above average and below average readers in order to determine if there was a relationship between reading ability and reasons for reading. Above average readers succeed at what they do, meaning they, according to Ngandu (181) “generally feel good about the activity promoting this feeling” (p. 131). It makes sense, then, that above average students—those experiencing success—enjoyed reading more than those who did not attain the high level of success (Ngandu, 1981). It also follows that the above average, successful reader will probably gain more knowledge from what is read. Indeed, the above average students more often supplied the knowledge reason for liking reading, as compared to the below average students' lesser emphasis of this reason (Ngandu, 1981).

Compton-Lilly found that middle school readers identified specific books, authors, series, and genres when discussing their book preferences. This is a departure from younger students,

who typically voiced generic references to words and books (Compton-Lilly, 2012). By middle school, Compton-Lilly (2012) found that students' reading preferences "were fairly intractable despite efforts by teachers and parents to expand students' reading interests" (p. 43).

II. Multiple Literacies

It's important to understand student motivations for reading before we attempt to understand how they approach these specific reading situations. Student literacy is constantly evolving and appears in a variety of settings. Educators must be familiar with multi-literacy—the presence of multiple forms of literacy within a student's life—in order to better understand, and in turn, serve their students. Today's students have grown up with a variety of multimodal literacies, including new genres of texts that are multilayered and image rich, as well as various forms of text messaging, blogging, podcasting, gaming, and Web environments for purposes of research, documentation, analysis, and presentation (Tierany, Bond, & Bresler, 2010). A student's ability to navigate across, among, and within the complex array of past and emerging literacies has become, according to Tierany, Bond, & Bresler (2010), "a reality rather than a hope and for many has become core rather than supplemental" (p. 360). To ignore the variety of literacy in students' lives is to ignore a core element of their lives as readers and thinkers. From social media engagement to online websites and eReaders, literacy has, in recent years, taken on an entirely new definition. Understanding this is paramount to understanding the present-day student.

The myriad of ways in which students communicate their realities largely dictates the proliferation of multi-literarcy. Tierany, Bond, & Bresler (2010) believe that new literacies and

their multimodal possibilities contribute to learning opportunities in ways that support complex and collaborative engagement with problems and issues, projects and topics, process and product, inquiry and discussion. For some they offer the possibility of empowerment (as opposed to disenfranchisement) (Tierany, Bond, & Bresler, 2010).

Reader Identity & Construction

I. The Basics of Identity Construction

Literacy, and more specifically, reading is more than what meets the eye. Students construct messages about themselves and others though reading and other forms of literacy. Reading is one specific way through which student identities are constructed. McCarthey (2001) says, "while cultural identity mediates the learning and use of literacy, literacy will subsequently alter an individual's view of himself" (p. 125). This means that despite cultural alignments, literacy has the power to change the way a child feels about him or herself. Au (1993, 1998) identified reading and writing workshops as avenues for promoting literacy for students from diverse backgrounds and suggested that practices should focus on making literacy personally meaningful for students by drawing upon their interests and experiences, teaching skills within context, and including multicultural literature in the curriculum.

Moje believes that identity matters because it shapes how humans makes sense of the world, including their experiences with texts (McCarthey & Moje, 2002). Who students are—and perceive themselves to be—influence how they interact, respond, and learn in classrooms. Because identity reflects the way a person interacts with classroom materials, books, and lectures, it is of extra importance that student identity be understood within the context of a

classroom. McCarthy wrote that during her research, she observed students whom "rejected the readings that teachers had chosen for them because they could not identify with the people in the stories" (p. 229). It follows from this, then, that to be aware of student identity is synonymous with honoring and supporting their corresponding reading identities. Readers and writers can come to understand themselves in particular ways as a result of literate engagement (Faigley, Cherry, Jollife, & Skinner, 1985; Ferdman, 1990; McCarthey, 2001). When educators consider identities to be social constructions—and therefore, always open for change and conflict depending on the social interaction they find themselves in—they can open up possibilities for rethinking the labels (for example, shy or aggressive; motivated or lazy) that they have used to traditionally identify students (McCarthey & More, 2002). By considering identity as an important concept that must be embraced, challenged, and reconceptualized, educators might be able to think about students and their literacy practices so as to help them reconsider these labels (McCarthey & More, 2002).

II. Reader Identity

Jones writes that becoming a reader involves much more than learning to decode and comprehend. Rather, it means becoming a certain kind of *person*, a person who is a reader and who often performs different as readers in different contexts (Jones, 2009). There are different kinds of readers, according to Jones: "readers who can't get enough science fiction, readers who speak out against injustices in written texts, readers who devour particular authors' books" (p. 20). A reader won't likely 'fit' into one category alone either. Many readers read in wide, deep,

and expansive ways across contexts and media, depending on the social and political situations in which they find themselves (Jones, 2009).

Teachers should be aware that reading identities matter in the classroom (Jones, 2009). Tending to issues of identity can expand possibilities not only for a student a teacher might be concerned about, but for everyone in the classroom community, as Jones writes, "you learn more from one another and respect one another's interests, desires and needs" (p. 25). Teachers can do a number of things, including:

1. Recognizing students' reading practices as performances of identifies that they may desire others to see in them.

2. Work to reposition students who are on the margins of reading "success" as having exceptional gifts to offer others in the classroom.

3. Encourage students to collect books, magazines, and names of websites they hope to read in the future.

4. Decrease the focus on student "behavior" and concentrate on the strength of students' reading.

When it comes specifically to bilingual students, a more nuanced approach to reader identity creation must be used. Apart from the direct encouragement of reading, students should be prompted to write, draw, and read about things important to them (Jones, 2009). Lots of opportunities for oral language communication (in any language) with peers during independent reading should also be incorporated into the day. A concerted effort on behalf of the teacher should be made to reposition bilingual students as knowledgeable readers who are valued in the classroom (Jones, 2009).

Cultivating, authorizing, and supporting various reader identifies is imperative in classrooms where multiple languages and reading levels are present. Reading ability is linked to student confidence. “A person’s sense of efficacy, an individual’s belief about his or her capacity to perform a task including processes such as reading or writing, affects how well the person performs the task” (Deci & Ryan, 1985). “Students with reading efficacy spend more time reading independently and have confidence in their ability to read successfully in the future” (Guthrie & Anderson, 1999). Good readers reported understanding what they read, talking more, and reading more frequently at home for enjoyment than poor readers (Canady & Krantz, 1996).

For avid readers and writers, in particular, much of their identity seemed to be tied to their literacy achievements (McCarthy & More, 2002). On the other hand, though, reader identity is also influenced by what is viewed as socially acceptable forms of literacy. Acceptable literacies depend on the social context, and our identities are constructed in relation to other’s perceptions of us (Tatum, 1997). In a conference presentation, Gloria Anzaldúa explained the connection between self-constructed identity and the role of others’ views in creating identity (McCarthey & More, 2002). Anzaldúa claimed that we are “clusters of stories we tell ourselves and others tell about us.”

The types of books that students like can tell us a lot about their reading identity. For example, expressing an enjoyment of classic literature requires, according to Dr. Compton-Lilly (2012), “particular types of identity commitments” (p. 45). This means that a student’s positioning as a reader is often linked to their school identity. To the student who likes classic

literature, reading classic texts was one dimension of the cultural model that accompanied being a good student (Compton-Lilly, 2012).

Book series are also a category of book that many middle school students identify strongly with. Worthy, Moorman, and Turner (1999) noted that teachers tended to prefer "young adult novels" and felt pressured to provide children with high quality literature in classrooms. While some teachers felt that series books were useful because they kept kids reading (Compton-Lilly, 2012). fewer than a third of the classrooms visited by Worthy and her colleagues (1999) provided more than a few copies of these books demonstrating an "ever-increasing gap between student preferences and the materials that schools provide and recommend" (p. 23). Like the students described by Kimmel (1982) and Hall and Coles (1999), the books loved by students were often not the same books appreciated by their teachers.

Books series are particularly appealing to children who struggle with reading. As Worthy (1996) found, series books "provide readers with a sense of mastery over conventions of reading (p. 210). Over time as students read multiple books within a series, the characters, language, and content of the books become increasingly familiar (Compton-Lilly, 2012). According to Compton-Lilly (2012), series books "enable even children who struggle with reading to comprehend the predictable plots and thus experience reading as enjoyable and relatively effortless" (p. 47).

Compton-Lilly (2012) posited that the popularity of series books implies "series books have social meaning that position these books as more palatable to students and more socially acceptable" (p. 49). As Saltman (1997) described, "There is a social glue, being able to dance the social dance with friends, which includes reading the same titles friends are reading and catching

allusions to characters" (p. 23). Reading series books maintained a non-school affiliation that might better reflect identity positioning that students were comfortable assuming (Compton-Lilly, 2012). It follows, then, that reading particular texts can be used to establish and maintain friendships. As Graff (2010) explained, "some books were valued more for their subject matter and potential status as a cultural object than as objects to be literally read" (p. 184). Students use books and other texts to represent themselves as particular types of readers, students and people (Compton-Lilly, 2012).

Environments for Building Successful Readers

I. Student Choice and Classroom Libraries

Students are most motivated when they have the most choice. When you raise the degree of individual choice, Bomer (2011) asserts that motivation, efficacy, and energy for the task also increase. Without interference from the teacher's agenda, a student in independent reading has the opportunity to think in a way he or she would when they are not in school—planning the next thing she will read, and what he or she might read after that (Bomer, 2011). When teachers commit to allotting time in class for independent reading, students are more likely to read outside of class as well, because they get interested in their book (Bomer, 2011).

Well-equipped classroom libraries lie at the center of a student's exploration into literacy. The more variety within the classroom library, the more possible it will be to meet the purposes, interests, and levels of difficulty appropriate for particular individual students (Bomer, 2011). One of the new roles educators take on in helping students compose reading lives is to be one of their resources for finding books that might hook them. For this reason, it's very helpful for

teachers to know about a lot of books. Within a classroom, a variety of different types of reading materials must be made available. Texts like non-narrative books, magazines, and collections of feature articles will interest students who may not necessarily find reading traditional books of much interest to them. Without these texts available, certain students might appear to their teachers to be unmotivated and struggling (Bomer, 2011).

Krashen (1992) believes the most powerful way of encouraging children to read is by "exposing them to light reading, a kind of reading that schools pretend to not exist, and a kind of reading that many children, for economic or ideological reasons, are deprived of" (p. 54). The presence of classroom libraries that contain diverse texts help to foster reader identity in students because their existence shows students the numerous ways in which they can position themselves as readers. One book does not fit all and translating this belief into classroom libraries shows children the importance of exploration and self discovery within the literate world.

In a study on reluctant readers, Worthy found that choice must be provided in instructional reading. Giving students choice in instructional materials can improve their attitudes towards school reading (Worthy, 1996). Opportunities for reading for enjoyment must also be provided in the classroom. This can be done in a number of ways, including providing *regular daily reading time* (Allington, 1994); having the teacher read along with students to *model* the enjoyment of reading (McCracken & McCracken, 1978); allowing opportunities for *sharing* but not requiring students to report on their reading (Manning & Manning, 1984; Palmer, Codling, & Gambrell; 1994; Sadoski, 1984); and allowing students to *choose* their reading materials (Carson, 1990; Worthy, 1996). Students should be encouraged to share books with each other, too (Manning & Manning, 1984). Classroom teachers should also provide materials that

students prefer. Real choice can only occur when student have opportunities to read materials that are personally interesting to them (Worthy, 1996).

II. Literacy Management

Using literacy to manage literacy is extremely common, important, and also often overlooked by educators (Bomer, 2011). Reading logs, in particular, allow students to manage their work on literate projects. This type of writing is not a matter of creating a single text, but of building a system that keeps projects in focus and helps students attend to the literate task at hand, as opposed to focusing on extraneous materials. When used this way, literacy is a visual support for students to remember, focus, and commit attention to specific tasks. This results in students becoming more fully engaged in texts (Bomer, 2011). Educator can support non-curriculum dictated literate behavior in order to make students aware of the kinds of texts that excite them, the authors with whom they identify, and the ways in which reading teaches them about the world (Bomer, 2011).

In order to provide students with an opportunity to assume a more proactive identity as a reader, teachers must design classroom spaces that position students as readers. as such a reader. Teachers have to create classrooms that ask students to, according to Bomer, “find what they are interested in reading, that expects them to find an answer to that question, [and] that asks them to develop some intentions about reading” (p. 71) . This means handing over more control to the students and giving them more responsibility for making decisions (Bomer, 2011).

<u>Book Clubs and Collaborative Literacy</u>

Reading is an inherently social activity. Students enjoy having company to share entertaining new events and ideas with. Reading is deeply social and when we read, we all have voices in our minds. These voices, according to Bomer (2011), want to be heard, and students want to hear other voices talk back to them "so that they can feel themselves defined in difference with others or agreement with them" (p. 83).

In group conversation, readers are able to hold on to ideas longer than they would if they were reading alone. Partnerships are good opportunities for students to make sure they actively understanding what is happening in the text (Bomer, 2011). Book clubs that emphasize reading as an experience rather than an academic task can attract students, even reluctant ones, to participate because they view the club as a social event rather something that conforms to the typical demands of daily classroom assignments (Mitchel & Harris, 2001). Roller and Beed (1994) agree, adding that "good exchanges and discussions help build feelings of competency, acceptance, and motivation that provide an entry point for less able readers to the literate world" (p. 62). Whitehead (2004) informs us that students involved in independent reading demonstrate increases in vocabulary, recognition of authors and book titles, state-mandated test scores, mastery of writing, and endurance in reading acts. It follows from this, then, that book clubs may provide an avenue for meeting the goal of increased adolescent literacy achievement (Whittingham & Huffman, 2009).

Jim Burke, a teacher and educational researcher, recommends the following twelve "ingredients" for a successful literature circle:

1. Children choose their own reading material.
2. Small, temporary groups are formed, based on book choice.

3. Different groups read different books.
4. Groups meet on a regular, predictable schedule.
5. Kids use written or drawn notes to guide both their reading and discussion.
6. Discussion topics come from the students.
7. Group meetings aim to be open, natural discussions.
8. In newly formed groups, students play a rotating assortment of task roles.
9. The teacher serves as a facilitator.
10. Evaluation is by teacher observation and student self-evaluation.
11. A spirit of playfulness and fun pervades the room.
12. New groups form around new reading choices.

Daniels (2008) shares that collaborative learning requires "(1) clear expectations, (2) mutually developed norms, (3) shared leadership and responsibility, (4) open channels of communication, (5) diverse friendship patterns, and (6) conflict resolution mechanisms" (pp. 35-6).

Brozo (2002) states, "[t]wo critical ways for creating meaningful incentives for students to read and learn [are] *choices* of texts and tasks and *control* over learning" (p. 18). Choice and control increase motivation, which leads to better understanding and recall of texts (Brozo, 2002). In addition to choice, educators also need to give students the opportunity to talk about their reading. One of the most compelling reasons for this is because of the importance of socializing to students—by making reading social, educators will entice students to read (Forsyth, 2008). Playing off of the socialization desires of students belies group settings. Working together via activities entails students to be engaged in a number of different forms of

collaboration and interaction with others in which they assumed a range of roles across a range of texts/projects (Tierany, Bond, and Bresler, 2010).

Summary of Literature Review

The themes of biliteracy, multi-literacy, student collaboration and reader identity within this literature review contextualize the environment where I performed my observations for this project. These concepts help to narrow my focus in this paper, as well as define my motivations for this research, prompting questions such as:

- What do students choose to read? Why?
- Does language play a role in student literacy choices and reading behaviors?
- What role, if any, does being bilingual play in the literate lives of these students?

The purpose of this thesis is to take an in-depth look at a fifth grade classroom at Progress Charter and observe the various literacy and reading behaviors that occur over the course of a semester. In this research, I collected information regarding student student reading behavior within a charter school setting.

Chapter 3: Methodology, Setting, and Participants

This thesis project examined the reading, book choice, and literacy practices present in one fifth grade classroom at Progress Charter in Austin, Texas. I chose this charter school because I have volunteered there for the past three years. I have a deeply personal, as well as professional, connection to this charter school system, therefore, it was only natural that I chose it as the site of my research. I was curious to see how their unique population and mission as a charter network worked together to develop empowered readers.

The intention of this project was to make observations and analyze new evidence in order to bolster the findings included in the literature review section of this thesis. I observed teaching practices and student behavior through observational sessions and the use of reading surveys. Because of the timeframe of the thesis project, I will not be able to make any concrete new conclusions about the role that bilingual language usage has on student literacy; however, I was able to make my own observations and synthesize this information into a concise conclusion about reader behavior within the classroom I observed in.

My objective with this project, as mentioned above, was to collect a set of new, general observations on an entire fifth grade classroom over the course of a few months. I also chose, with the help of my classroom teacher, six students for close observation. To combat the limitations of the thesis project; i.e., not being able to interview people under the age of 18, I conducted interviews with the classroom teacher whose classroom I observed in. Two primary factors—bilingual language education background and current English-proficiency as it related to book choice and reading behavior—were used to select the students for closer observation. These factors also dictated the direction of my research and questions included on the reading surveys I distributed throughout the semester. Overall, this project looked at how reading behavior inside classroom influenced reader identity. Inherent in this question lies an understanding of the literacies present within the classroom. What books do students choose? What does this information tell us about the reading identities of monolingual and bilingual students, if anything? How can we use this information to better foster emergent literacies in diverse classrooms and create a generation of reading-loving, literacy-pursuing students? By analyzing students who represent a variety of English level proficiency and reading levels, this

study contributes to our understanding of how involvement in literacy learning may contribute to a healthier, more productive culture of literacy in the classroom.

I was interested to see what role the charter school environment—one that caters to, among other underrepresented populations, Spanish-speaking students and their families—has on bilingual students' reading behavior. There are not many studies comparing bilingual students, their English proficiency levels, and the books they choose; most research deals with one or the other. With this project, I hope to uncover new information regarding charter-school students and their reading behavior, and how this particular environment fosters certain literacy practices.

Setting

The classroom I observed in was an English-only fifth grade classroom at one of the middle schools within the Progress Charter school district. The Progress Charter public school district serves about 5,000 students from Austin, Texas and its surrounding areas. The system is made up of four elementary schools, four middle schools, and two high schools. Open-enrollment charter schools are public schools that have the flexibility to adapt to the educational needs of individual students. Open-enrollment charter schools vary in mission and model, serving a wide range of students, many with needs beyond the one-size-fits-all traditional public school. Often, these charter schools provide a personalized learning environment that promotes greater student achievement. In exchange for some autonomy, charter schools have increased accountability, and must meet the testing standards dictated by the state. Charter schools receive state funds based on the average daily attendance of students (same as traditional public schools); however, they do not receive funds from local tax revenue and the majority, including Texas

charters, do not receive state facilities funding. Texas Education Agency (TEA) data indicates that charter schools receive approximately $1,200 less in total revenue per pupil than traditional public schools. In the State of Texas, charter schools operate under and receive academic accountability ratings from the Texas Education Agency. All charter students in Texas take the same State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) and End of Course (EOC) tests as traditional public school students.

Qualitative Data Collection

Table 1 shows my timeline for data collection. To gather information on students and their reading behaviors, observations were conducted between the months of January 2017 and April 2017. I observed once a week during these months. A total of four reading surveys were distributed to get student perspectives on the literacy practices in their lives. These surveys were passed out in March and April. The classroom teacher was also interviewed in order to get a better sense of role that curriculum and instruction played in forming attitudes around reading and literacy. My survey questions all centered around literacy activities, reading behavior, and book choice. I asked students to self-report on their reading/literacy behavior. The students selected for extended observation were chosen by their teacher. Selection was based on three factors: reading behavior, reading level, and bilingual status. My interview with my classroom teacher, Ms. Jones, took place in her classroom before my normal observation period. This interview was recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Table 1 Timeline for data collection

January 2017	February 2017	March 2017	April 2017	May 2017
Obtain permission from school				
Classroom observation begins	Classroom observation cont'd	Classroom observation cont'd	Classroom observation cont'd	
		Distribute reading surveys 1-3	Distribute reading survey 4	
	Design teacher interview and student surveys based on initial analysis of data from classroom observation and interviews	Continue to design teacher interview and student surveys based on initial analysis of data from classroom observation and interviews	Synthesize reading surveys 1-4	Continue to synthesize reading surveys 1-4
		Conduct teacher interview		

Participants

The classroom I observed in had a total of 28 students. There was one classroom teacher, Ms. Jones (a pseudonym) who was in her fifth year of teaching. The ages of students in this classroom ranged from 11 to 12 years old. Approximately 80 students in the entire fifth grade class this year matriculated from the same charter system's dual language elementary schools, meaning a large percentage of the fifth grade population received bilingual instruction for at least one year before coming to Progress Charter. Based on this charter school's model, I sought to explore the implications of how a bilingual background affects reader behavior and identity. Data

collection included interviews with my classroom teacher, classroom observations, and analyses of student reading surveys.

My classroom teacher, Ms. Jones, hand-selected six bilingual students for me to observe more closely. Four out of the six students were labeled as "on-track" for passing the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) test. The other two were not "on-track" for passing the STAAR test. By observing bilingual students from these two different categories, I was able to get a better sense of how speaking both Spanish and English was linked to reader behavior, if at all.

My cluster of students was comprised of four boys and two girls. The "on-track" group consisted of two boys and two girls and the not "on-track" group was made up of two boys. All of these students were between the ages of 11 and 12. Of the six students, four matriculated from Progress Charter's dual language elementary schools. This means that they came into the fifth grade with some amount of dual-language instruction in Spanish.

II. Bilingual Case Study Students

A. Student Profiles

- *Student 1—Alex (pseudonym)*

Alex was described by Ms. Jones as "a classic intellectual," meaning he sometimes struggles with being wrong and/or having to re-do his work. He can read any type of book because he is on a high school reading level. Alex has, unlike his other classmates, avoided the social experiences that reading can generate. He isn't influenced by his peers' book choices—instead, he likes reading non-fiction books. "[Alex] doesn't have a huge amount of friends so the

way he chooses books is different. Peer pressure very rarely impacts him outwardly," said Ms. Jones. Alex was chosen for this study precisely because peer pressure, according to Ms. Jones, doesn't affect his reading behavior in the same way it does his peers.

- *Student 2—Katie (pseudonym)*

According to Ms. Jones, Katie is quiet and shy, but with a heart of gold. Her teacher described her as someone who has always been an advanced reader and is highly self-motivated. Ms. Jones said she is a very strong reader who discovered her love of reading this year through book series like *The Hunger Games* and *Harry Potter*. She truly enjoys engaging in conversations about books and tends to be more well-rounded in her book choices, according to Ms. Jones. Katie is able to articulate her motivations for choosing certain books, making her an ideal candidate for this study. Katie has also, through her love of reading, found a group of girlfriends that enjoy getting tougher and talking about books. Her relationship with them lends itself to the social nature of reading.

- *Student 3—Jacob (pseudonym)*

Jacob was described as "pretty high academically" by Ms. Jones but with "zero interest in doing class things." Jacob loves to read comic books and graphic novels but has little interest in exploring other genres of books. Despite being disengaged during class, Jacob can answer any question Ms. Jones asks him. "[Jacob] really has no interest in classwork or doing his work with quality. But he knows what's happening. If you ask him to answer something, he can," said Ms. Jones. Jacob often doesn't read on his level because he wants to read the books his friends are

reading and his friends are on much lower reading levels than he is. “He doesn’t really care about [reading levels],” said Ms. Jones. “He just wants to be able to read what [his friends are] reading and share books with them. The role of peer recommendation and peer pressure is there for him,” she went on to say. This peer-pressure was of particular interest to me, hence his being chosen for closer observation.

- *Student 4—Lola (pseudonym)*

Lola is a student who has made tremendous growth throughout the course of the year. When Lola entered fifth grade, she was at third grade reader, according to Ms. Jones. She is she’s pushing towards a fifth grade level. She is genuinely excited to read books. “Every day she pulls out *The Fault in our Stars* and she is excited to talk about it. Her love of reading has grown a ton which is really exciting,” said Ms. Jones. Lola was chosen for the study because unlike Alex and Katie, she did not enter fifth grade with an inherent love of reading. Lola’s reading behavior has grown over the year, which has affected her the way she socializes. “As she has become a better reader, [Lola] is choosing different people to connect to in class,” said Ms. Jones.

- *Student 5—Jordan (pseudonym)*

Jordan is the only student in my group that is repeating fifth grade. He’s been on a third grade reading level throughout the course of the year and hasn’t made much progress in moving to a fourth grade level. Jordan loves to read comics and “generally reads closer to his reading level,” said Ms. Jones. She went on to say that despite this, she doesn’t “think he’s really focused. He has kind of given up this year. [During the] first semester he was really trying, really

with it, and then he realized he was still struggling and he just kind of gave up." Ms. Jones believes he likes reading and even points to his relationship with Jacob as being responsible for his increased interest in reading. She said, "he likes reading more than he used to because of Jacob and [because] Jacob is kind of cool in Jordan's mind." Within Jordan's reading behavior also lies a social element, making him an interesting candidate for observation, too.

- *Student 6—Chris (pseudonym)*

Chris is a shy and silly student who has not yet come into his reading renaissance, according to Ms. Jones. Chris feels pressured to read the books his friends are reading despite those books not being on an appropriate reading level for him. Chris is on a 1st grade reading level and Ms. Jones said that if she gives Chris books to read that are on his level, "he doesn't want to read them because he feels like they're baby books." She went on to say that, "no matter how much you talk about it, there's always that social pressure of wanting to look cool. And it looks better in kids' heads to read big books than it does to read small books, even if that's not helping them and they don't know what's happening." For Chris, peer pressure as it relates to book choice and reader behavior has negatively affected him. Instead of reading the books that will help him move on to the next reading level, he chooses books that will align him socially with his peers.

Of these six students, Alex, Katie, Jacob, and Lola matriculated from Progress Charter's dual language elementary schools. This means that they came into the fifth grade with some amount of dual-language instruction in Spanish over the course of their elementary schooling. Jordan and Chris did not come from a Progress Charter elementary school.

II. Teacher

Ms. Jones is a female, in her mid-twenties, and has been teaching for a total of five years. She began her teaching career with 7th and 8th grade social studies and did so from 2012-2014. She started teaching English Language Arts (ELA) at Progress Charter for the 2014-2015 school year and has been teaching there for the past three years. Ms. Jones originally wanted to be a social studies teacher when she applied to Progress Charter but after she received the job, they told her they didn't have slots open for social studies. The school asked her what she was most interested in teaching and as an avid reader, she "was really excited to try taking on the beast of teaching reading to fifth grade students." Ms. Jones went on to say:

> It is a really special year and subject because so many of our students find this to be their most challenging subject…I love when students finally find a book they really love and realize that they do not "hate reading," [but that] they just never found their perfect book. It honestly takes one to two great books to spark a kid's interest and then they are hooked.

Ms. Jones believes that "Literacy is Power." The majority of her classes consist of second-language learners whom have had first experiences with the challenges of reading and writing in English at a proficient level (both for themselves and for their families). To combat this, Ms. Jones and her fellow fifth-grade ELA teachers begins the year with a "Profile of Literacy" where they share the stories of multiple adults who give answers to a variety of questions about why literacy is important to them. The teachers focus on bilingual and multilingual people so their students can see how "their power can be multiplied by bilingual abilities," Ms. Jones said. The result in a body of students, according to Ms. Jones, who feel

powerful and capable because they already know more about two languages [themselves] than many adults in the world. It "gives them hope and some added motivation that they can do hard things and [these things] have a purpose," said Ms. Jones.

Chapter 4: Findings

Classroom/Curriculum

The classroom I observed in was comprised of 28 students. There were a variety of tool and activities used by the classroom teacher to foster literacy and enhance learning. The worksheets used to accompany lessons were created by two teachers, including my classroom teacher. Every week, students were given a "Powerful Readers Reading Log" to record their reading for the week. Students were asked to read for at least 30 minutes a night for the duration of the week and respond to different writing prompts throughout the week. Prompts included summarization, making predictions, character study, and visualization. Teacher-created worksheets were always present in the classroom and accompanied every lesson.
While not free-form, the teacher-created worksheets have an important role in the literacy management of students. They were designed to teach kids the importance of organization and self-management.

In this classroom, there were lots of opportunities for free reading and literacy exploration. In fact, it was readily encouraged. During free time, students were expected to read their personal choice books. Free reading time was called "Just Right Books" time (JRB hereinafter). JRB describes books that students can both decode (read the words) and comprehend (understand the meaning). Students find "Just Right Books" by using the "5 Finger

Rule." The "5 Finger Rule" helps students determine if a book is too easy, just right, or too hard for them. To determine this, students open the book to a page and hold up a finger for every word they don't know. 0 to 1 words means the book too easy; 1 to 2 means it's a perfect choice; 3-4 means it may be tough but students can give it a try; and 5 or more means the book is too hard. Students were constantly reminded of what JRB meant and what strategies to use to find a JRB. Students were told "when you come to a tricky word, grab a sticky note. Write the word, the clues and 'I think this word means…'on a sticky note and stick the note right by the spot in the text where you made your inference. Then look up the word in the dictionary to see if your inference is correct. You must complete at least 2 sticky notes."

Ms. Jones and her co-ELA teacher fought hard to ensure that JRB time happens every single day. The majority of research around reading growth has come to the conclusion that students make the most growth when they read self-selected books on their own reading level. According to Ms. Jones, her students love JRB time:

> Although they may feel tempted to chat throughout the rest of class, once they are settled in with their books they are good to go. Many students ask for more time to read their own book. It's pretty great! They are motivated to read something they like, and the best part is that if they don't like the book or aren't interested they can just put it back and find a new one. It is very low pressure reading.

Class Library, Book Clubs, and Book Choice

The difference between the "unmotivated and struggling" student and the student who just hasn't grown into their reading groove yet is important and notable. Understanding the

difference between the two groups allows educators to be more sensitive to their students' needs. If a teacher understands the role that literacy plays in shaping student identity—as opposed to immediately labeling undesirable behavior as the result of being a "bad" student—then he or she can begin to incorporate literacy with more intentionality in his or her classroom. Immediately punishing a student who appears to be off-task and struggling only serves to validate the student's own self-perception as a "bad" student. In many ways, literacy is the key to breaking negative self-image among students.

It follows from this, then, that in spaces where students are navigating their literate worlds, understanding the role that literacy plays in constructing student identity is crucial. Ms. Jones had her own classroom library which she took great care to develop and organize. The books in her library were organized by genre and not by reading level in order to encourage students to seek out books that were appropriate for them on their own (as opposed to with the help of labels or a teacher).

I. Environments for Building Readers

Well-equipped classroom libraries lie at the center of a student's exploration into literacy. Randy Bomer (2011) writes:

> A classroom library, especially in a secondary school, needs a lot of books…Access to appropriate and diverse print materials is a huge determiner of reading achievement, and these libraries, each serving over a hundred students, need to get big fast, and they need to contain appropriately varied materials to serve very diverse student interests, preferences, and needs (p. 74).

Upon entering the classroom, I couldn't help but notice the expansive classroom library. There were numerous bookcases, each of which housed a different genre of book. This diversity of texts allows for each and every reader to find something they will like. With these organizational strategies in place, readers were able to better explore their own literacies and could do so with more freedom. In my classroom teacher's room, her library took up nearly one whole wall of the classroom. The available genres in said library included: "fast-pass;" fantasy, non-fiction; mystery/adventure; sports/teamwork; science fiction; African-American/Asian/ Hispanic, Latino, Native American lead characters; historical fiction; award winning authors and classics; action with strong female characters; animal-lead characters; mystery/horror/suspense; and bookclub only books. Ms. Jones' library consisted of books mainly in English.

Books were organized by category and given a corresponding colored dot based on whatever genre they fell into. My classroom teacher emphasized the importance of having students be able to choose an appropriate book, hence her decision not to sort and organize books by level. Additionally, she said that background knowledge often dictated what students chose to read, regardless of their reading level. For example, if a student is really interested in animals and has done a lot of reading in that category, he or she will most likely have the background knowledge to be able to understand a book that might be at a higher reading level. Therefore, it doesn't always make sense to group texts by reading level. A student's reading ability is fluid and their classroom library should be organized as such. The benefits from classroom teacher's decision to honor this fluidity show up all over her classroom. Students often came to her for advice what books to read, asking if a this or that book was a good choice for them. Ultimately, though, the responsibility of choosing a book was up to the student.

There were not, however, many books available in Spanish. There were a few Spanish language books in the "Fast Pass" section of her library, but these books were on a kindergarten to first grade reading level. Despite having a number of bilingual students in her classroom, almost all of the available book options were in English. This was the same in Ms. Jones' co-teacher's room. Her classroom library had very few Spanish-language texts for students to choose from. If 80 fifth graders came from Progress Charter's dual language elementary schools, it's safe to assume that a large portion of the fifth grade population was accustomed to biliterate reading experiences during their K-4 schooling.

A. Fountnas & Pinnell Reading Levels

Despite the lack of rules when it came to book choice, there was a science behind assigning initial reading levels and how students moved from one reading level to the next. Fountas & Pinnell (F&P)—a system of reading levels developed by Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell to support their guided reading method—was used in the classroom I observed in. The vision behind F&P is to:

> Recognize every child's right to grow up literate as a member of a dynamic learning community that values the richness of linguistic, ethnic, and cultural diversity…Through dynamic literacy education that exemplifies the beliefs and core values described below, students come to understand their physical, social, and emotional world and their roles as informed global citizens—hallmarks of the literate lives they can lead.

In the fifth grade class at Progress Charter, student were tested via the F&P Benchmark Assessment Systems. These tests, according to the F&P website, are "accurate and reliable tools

to identify the instructional and independent reading levels of all students and document student progress through one-on-one formative and summative assessments" ("Fountas and Pinnell Literacy"). Table 2 shows each reading level and its corresponding grade level.

Table 2 | Fountas & Pinnell reading levels

Recommended Grade	Fountas and Pinnell level
K	A, B, C
1	C, D, E, F, G, H, I
2	I, J, K, L, M
3	M, N, O, P
4	P, Q, R, S
5	S, T, U, V
6	V, W, X, Y
7	Y, Z
8 and above	Z
Highschool/Adult	Z+

In order to determine a student's reading level, a number of steps are taken. At the beginning of the school year, students are tested using F&P materials to determine their reading level. Students are asked to read an article while teachers track their fluency and ask a series of comprehension questions. Based on their score, they are given a grade. This grade is cross-referenced with their Measure of Academic Progress, or MAP, score, which is a part of the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA). Fifth graders that matriculate from Progress' elementary schools bring their MAP test scores with them, meaning teachers have access to their reading levels upon a student's entrance into their classroom. Once the F&P and MAP scores are compared against each other, a student can be given their reading level. These levels range from

A to Z+ with A indicating a kindergarten reading level and Z+ indicating a high school reading level. Each level has three to four gradients within it, meaning a student can be categorized as, for example, a beginning of third grade reader, a middle of third grade reader, and an end of third grade reader. This pattern continues all the way through level Z. To move on from one letter (level) to the next, a student must read thirteen books at their current grade level. Students are made aware of their reading levels at the beginning of the year. My classroom teacher met with each of her students and showed them their individual levels, including its grade level equivalent, and their MAP score. Students are also told what their score means and what types of books they might see within their level. The goal for all with graders is for them to grow by 2 years (and not just two levels). Students keep a piece of paper with all the information about their reading levels so they can remind themselves of where they are, where they need to go, and how to get there.

My 6 students were on different F&P levels:

- Alex is on level Z. He is at an 8th grade reading level.
- Katie is on level Z. She is at a 7th grade reading level.
- Jacob is on level X. He is at a 6th grade reading level.
- Lola is on level V. She is at a 5th grade reading level.
- Jordan is on level N. He is at a 3rd grade reading level.
- Chris is on level N. He is at a 3rd grade reading level.

Of the two reading classes Ms. Jones taught, there were a total of 58 students. Her two classes—class one and class two—had students on a variety of different reading levels:

Table 3 | Progress Charter 5th Grade F & P levels

F&P Level	# of readers in Class One	# of readers in Class Two
K-2	11	4
3	6	9
4	6	2
5	3	6
6	2	3
7/8	0	2
HS	0	3

B. Teaching Book Choice

In addition to individual conferences with students, book choice is also taught in the classroom as part of a greater lesson on literacy. At the beginning of the year, the fifth grade teachers go over what the library is, how to choose books, how to self-monitor when reading difficult texts, how to solve comprehension alarms when students have them. This "metacognition behavior," as Ms. Jones referred to it as, helps kids understand and contextualize their experience as a readers within the classroom. More recently, students have been reminded of the importance of metacognition during the reading process. Students have metacognition meetings every Wednesday during class to ensure they are being active and engaged participants in their own exploration into literacy.

When a student needed to get a new book, Ms. Jones asked them questions like, "what was the last book you liked?" or "what was the last book you read on your level?" She also monitored her students' choices, adding input such as, "that's too easy" and "make sure they're

hard enough." Through these prompts, Ms. Jones modeled book choice behaviors for her students.

Reading levels can be particularly helpful when it comes to navigating book choice outside of school, too. According to my classroom teacher, having a specific reading level allows students to, for example, go the library and ask the librarian to help them find an on-level book that interests them. All they have to do is present the librarian with their reading level and the two of them can go from there. Having a specific reading level also helps when parents are trying to buys books for their kids. It's "good for [students'] parents to know where they are and what those numbers mean," my classroom teacher said.

Parents were kept further in the loop about the Progress' fifth-grade ELA curriculum as it related to reading and literacy via home communication and meetings, too (see Appendix 4 for examples of home communication). Literacy was an activity that the fifth grade teachers viewed as something that should occur both in school and at home, hence the importance placed on frequent home communication. The purpose of these letters home, as well as parent teacher conferences throughout the year, was to keep parents actively involved in the literate lives of their children. This parent-teacher partnership also helped equip parents with the skills necessary to support their child's pursuit of literacy at home. There was also a meeting at the beginning of the school year for "New to Progress Charter Parents" where my classroom teacher and her fellow fifth-grade ELA teacher were able to overview the reading level assignment process and how it translates into book choice for their students. These teachers also remind parents of reading levels and appropriate book choice strategies during conferences during the year. Parents

were also required to sign-off on all of their kids' reading logs and home communication forms, thus ensuring everyone was on the same page.

II. Book Clubs

A. Qualifications for Book Club via STAAR Benchmark Scores

About three weeks into observing my classroom, the fifth-grade ELA department started their grade-wide book clubs. Students who were "on-track" to pass the STAAR test participated in bookclubs in one classroom, while the students who were not "on-track" to pass did stations in another classroom. The stations class did a mixture of activities while the bookclub class participated in bookclubs. During stations, students completed worksheets, read independently, and participated in small, teacher-led activities.

With regards to STAAR benchmark scores, students were either not-passing, on level two, or on level three. Not passing indicated a student has not been able to get a 61% or higher on the benchmark. Students who did not pass the benchmark were put into one classroom and participated in stations. Students on level two or level three were in another classroom and participated in book clubs. Being on level two indicated a STAAR passing rate of at least 61%. This percentage is created by looking at what the average performance across the state is and how that compares to what is expected of kids based on the rigor of the test. Level three is considered advanced and indicates a score of an 87% or higher.

On the walls of the classroom was a poster with "5G Reading Goals." This poster reminded kids of the goals set forth by their teachers. More so than that, though, this poster served as a tangible reminder of the connection between student efficacy and educator standards.

Kids were kept on the same page as their teachers when it came to success in the classroom. These shared goals included:

- 100% of students making 2 or more years of reading growth on F&P
- 100% of students meeting the MAP college readiness growth target
- 100% of students earning a level 2 on STAAR by round 2

Katie and Alex are on level three and have continually been on this level all year. Lola is on level two and, according to her teacher, worked really hard to get to this level. She did not start off on level two at the beginning of the year. Jacob is also on level two and is in the upper 70s range. His teacher said that lately he has been getting a lot of 80s and might end up on level 3 by the end of the year. Jordan is not yet on level two. He is sitting in the 40s range and moving him to a higher range has been difficult, says his teachers. Chris is also not yet on level two and has not shown a lot of growth throughout the year.

B. Rationale for Book Clubs & Effects of Participation on Students

During my interview with my classroom teacher, she said that the "book club unit is all about a more structured free-reading time with a group of students who love books, thinking, and discussion. The book club unit is modeled off of real book clubs that many adults or college students might be part of, and then scaffolded back to what fifth graders can do based on their personal abilities. Our hope is that students become more well-rounded readers, thinkers, speakers, and writers." Groups and book were chosen during a "book tasting." Students are prompted to think about genres, authors, and titles they have enjoyed in the past in order to get an idea of their "readernality," or reader personality. After this, students have a chance to try out

all the books selected by the fifth-grade ELA teachers for book club. All of the book club books were chosen because they were high interest novels. These books were then placed all over the room in groups on tables. Students had around 25 minutes to travel to the tables and find books that are "Just Right" for them and seem interesting. Then students were asked to write down their top 5 personal favorites. The next day students created their own groups by finding two or more other students who also liked the same top one to two favorite books they did.

The rationale behind the book clubs was to create an environment in which students had freedom over the reading experience. Adults in book clubs choose the books they want to read and are motivated to read and discuss these books because they are genuinely interested in them. "Autonomy is what strong readers love most," said Ms. Jones. Students are taught different habits of discussion and listening in order to be good members of a book clubs. The book clubs are entirely student run and controlled—students created their own literature circle norms (See Appendix 3), decided how many pages to read a day and use specific skills as their focus to create questions while reading. Every couple of days students have a chance to discuss their thoughts about the book with their group members. The fifth-grade ELA teachers experimented with different levels of formality for the book clubs, but found that "the love of reading and best discussions generally appear when [the clubs] are less formal and more student-led and organic," said Ms. Jones.

The social nature of bookclubs lends itself to group settings. Reading in partnerships often indicates engagement in texts—kids, after all, want to be able to share what they are reading with their friends. Hence, the book-club strategy employed by the fifth grade teachers at my school was a perfect way to blend the desire for social interaction with reading.

An essential part of the bookclubs were the discussions that occurred. Students were always given a worksheet and/or guidelines for their conversations, but the teacher made sure that there was a focus on student agency within these discussions. Students weren't expected to answer questions on a sheet of paper or take a quiz. Instead, they were reminded frequently to talk about what they wanted and really dive down deep into the text.

I witnessed first hand the power of the group discussion. In small bookclub groups, students were relaxed and at-ease—they were with their friends, after all! Smiles and laughter were frequent, which in turn led to a wonderful sense of security within these groups and allowed for real conversation to occur. The "unmonitored" nature of the bookclubs let students explore their texts in a way that made sense to them. In these groups, agency was key. I saw certain students step up and serve as the unofficial group leader, asking their group members what they thought of a certain character or plot twist. Other students shared silly theories on what would happen next and why. In each and every group I observed, creative and appropriate engagement with the text was in full bloom. These fifth graders had ownership over their books from start to finish, which made a world of difference. They were allowed to pick their books, their groups, and how they directed the conversation, ultimately proving (whether they knew it consciously or not) that reading can be fun when it's made personal.

The stations class, however, wasn't doing student-directed reading in small groups like the bookclub class was. Classwork in the stations class consisted of silent reading time, teacher-led inquiry, independent worksheet completion, and online computer activities, including Advanced Reading (AR).

Students

I. General Observations

As I became more familiar with the students that Ms. Jones and I selected for closer observation, I really honed in on how they operated within the classroom setting. My observations in class didn't follow any particular structure or guidelines. During every two-hour instructional period that I observed, I wrote down general observations and then made comments and predictions based on those observations. I wasn't on the lookout for anything in particular when I observed—in fact, I let student behavior and student interactions with their texts dictate the course of my observations and research. As time went on, though, my observations became more focused on what and how students were reading.

A. Access to Books

During one observation session, I went around and counted the number of library books, classroom library books, and books from home I saw. My intention with this was to get an idea of what place(s) students got their books from and whether there was a majority in any one category. I counted five books from Ms. Jones' class library, six books brought from home (and presumably bought from a bookstore or online), and four books from the Austin Public Library. While there was no overwhelming majority of a certain type of book in the classroom on that particular day, it was still reassuring to see that students got books from a variety of sources.

A unique aspect of Progress Charter's fifth grade reading class was their monthly trip to the Austin Public Library (see Appendix 4 for home communication regarding these trips). Within a population where access to books might be limited due to number of factors, including

parents being busy with work, not having access to transportation, or not being biliterate, Ms. Jones and her fellow teachers worked hard to change this reality. Mackey (1990) noted that series books are easily accessible for children whose families have economic means to purchase books as they are released or as children move through the series. Having trips to the library built into the curriculum acted as a way to mitigate these outside barriers to book series reading. Library cards were free, which greatly reduced any previous barriers to student reading. When money isn't a factor, students are able to freely explore the texts they want to read.

B. Book Choice

In this classroom, students strongly identified with series books. Ms. Jones mentioned that for some of her students, book series provided an entry into a greater exploration into reading. For example, a student who read book one of the *Harry Potter* series may find themselves able to read the rest of the series—which may be, by all intents and purposes, above their reading level—simply because they are familiar with the characters, context, and language. Book series can help readers grow simply by providing built-in scaffolding for emerging readers. As the books increase in complexity, characters, and plot lines, students are able to push themselves and grow in their reading abilities, too.

Comic books, Manga, and graphic novels were other types of books that I saw frequently in this classroom. Like series books for advanced readers, comic books and graphic novels provided an entry point into literacy for reluctant and struggling readers. I would posit that the images in these types of books help reluctant readers follow along and stay connected to the text in ways they had not found in text-only books. Because of the social stigmas that arise as a result

of reading levels and their corresponding books, comic books allowed students to fit into the category of a traditional reader in a way that wasn't possible for them before. With graphic novels and comic books, reluctant readers can say they are readers, too, which does a world of wonder for reader confidence.

One technique I observed Ms. Jones and her co-teacher doing in their classrooms was to create a separate space for comic books and graphic novels. This helped to positively position this type of book within the greater context of the classroom library. Instead of these books being considered "less than" or "for babies," they were given their own space in the class library, thus legitimizing them.

C. Reading Level & its Role in Shaping Student Identity

The books that are on students' reading level greatly affected the way they viewed themselves as readers. For students that were on higher reading levels, the books they were able to read positioned them as stronger, better readers within the classroom. This was a position that wasn't just apparent to them, but to the rest of their classmates as well. The books that advanced readers read, therefore, became symbolic of books that "good readers" read.

In some cases, students were acutely aware of the stigma that reading certain books placed upon them, and therefore, tried to "read up" in order to avoid being categorized as a struggling or "low level" reader. In this case, certain books were not viewed as being a gateway into literacy or the key to being labeled as a reader in the same way their peers were. These lower level books were viewed as a constant reminder of how far these students still had to go, in their minds, to catch up with their peers. With these students, the reputation of certain reading levels

did not function as a positive and motivating force, but instead, as an impediment to real reading progress. For example, Chris frequently "read up" in order to impress his peers and not appear behind in reading ability. Chris is, according to Ms. Jones, pressured into reading what his friends are reading, but he can't comprehend these texts in the same way his peers can. "He will pretend to understand [the book] but he can't," said Ms. Jones. "There's always that social pressure of wanting to look cool," she said, which in some cases negatively affects student reading comprehension and progress.

D. Ability Grouping

The metrics for determining who was eligible to participate in book clubs ended up subtly grouping the two populations by ability. Separating the class into two groups—with one group not being able to participate in bookclubs—excluded students that had the most to gain from social reading experiences. From this, it can be inferred that these bookclubs were viewed as being less important in bringing students' STAAR scores up than the stations were. It's difficult to balance the pursuit of reading with something as definitive as standardized testing, especially when standardized tests determine a student's moving on to the next grade and readernality does not. Prioritizing one over the other is easy to do, hence the ease with which ability grouping was carried out in these classrooms.

In the stations class, students seemed less excited about their work than their counterparts in the bookclub class. Students misbehaved and got off-task in both of the classes I observed; however, student engagement and excitement were markedly less in the stations class. While the link between ability grouping and student behavior wasn't the focus of my research—nor did I

devote enough time to adequately observe any connection between the two—I couldn't help but notice some sort of correlation between these two entities. Classroom structures, like ability grouping and exclusion from bookclubs, might have contributed to to the negative reader identities of some of the lower-achieving students. Students in the stations class knew why they were there—for not passing the STAAR benchmark—and therefore, might have began to internalize this message in a negative way.

E. Gendered Book Choices

While gender distinctions were by no means the law in Ms. Jones' class, I saw them being adhered to for the most part. For both gender groups, friendships and social groupings were based on book genre. There was the group of advanced girl readers that read and discussed book series like *Harry Potter* and *The Hunger Games*. I also saw a number of girls reading the *Dork Diaries* series, as well as the *Cirque de Freak* series. *The Maze Runner* series was also popular with boys and girls.

Boys tended to read more comics and Manga. Popular series included *One Punch Man*, *Naruto, and Calvin & Hobbes*. I suspect that the abundance of comic books and graphic novels amongst the male population in the class was a result of the socialization that surrounded these texts. Groups of boys passed books around and shared book recommendations with each other, so it only makes sense that this particular style of book was so gendered.

II. Student Observations

During my observations, I paid extra attention to the six students selected for closer observation. They all interacted with their classmates and within their classes in different ways. When I observed each of these students, I kept an eye out for book choice (s), reader behavior, and interactions with peers.

A. Stations Class

Jordan (not yet passing STAAR benchmark; participated in stations class; F&P level: N)

I first became aware of Jordan after noticing his love of comic books. He excitedly professed his love for all things Manga. His teacher described him as a predictable reader in that he typically only read comic books and graphic novels. When I observed him, he was an active participant in all class discussions. His hand always shot up when the teacher asked a question. During stations, he wasn't always engaged or paying attention, which was largely a product of him being distracted by some of his peers. Despite being disengaged and distracted at times, Jordan seemed to have a good grasp on the material. He appeared to be a stronger/faster reader than his peers when compared side by side. When it came to sharing answers, however, Jacob really shone. He was able to answer questions asked by his teacher and did so with excitement. He continually raised his hand to answer questions when prompted.

Jordan grew 10% on his STAAR benchmark but did not perform well enough to participate in bookclubs. Ms. Jones said he had been sitting in the 40th percentile for the majority of the year. Despite not progressing much over the course of the year, Jordan still participated in class, especially in comparison to his peers. When I watched him during stations and teacher-led groups in the stations class, his participation and excitement for learning was apparent. However,

Jordan is friends with one of the class troublemakers, which led to him getting distracted and/or called out by his teacher(s) at times.

Chris (not yet passing STAAR benchmark; participated in stations class; F&P level: N)

Chris tended to be shyer in group settings but came to life when he was in smaller groups. During a teacher-led station one day, Chris asked numerous questions and even offered answers before being asked to. He followed along with his teacher's prompts and followed directions closely. He was willing to try and exert effort, even if he wasn't correct all the time. Despite his good behavior, though, his reading level still remained much lower than that of his peers'. With Chris, I wonder if the individual attention provided during stations was as beneficial to his academic progress than reading practice would have been. Perhaps all he needs is more pressure free, independent reading time to catch himself up to a fifth grade reading level.

As for his reading behavior, Chris has, according to Ms. Jones, remained in the same place for most of the year. She has tried to get him to read books that are on his level, but he "reads up" in order to read the same things as his friends and not appear cool. In Chris' case, the peer pressure that comes along with book choice has negatively impacted him. Chris' situation begs the question about who a bookclub is most appropriate for. For reluctant readers on the cusp of being on a fifth grade reading level, peer pressure forces them to challenge themselves— a challenge which they can rise to. For Chris, though, he is not close enough to a fifth grade reading level to realistically "read up." His reluctance to read on his level and progress the normal way could be largely responsible for his lack of growth.

B. Bookclub Class

Jacob (level 2 on STAAR benchmark; participated in bookclubs; F&P level: X)

During bookclubs, Jacob served as the glue between his chatty group member and his quieter group member. He asked the quiet student in his group what his thoughts were and always worked hard to loop him into the conversation. Jacob also always had a thought or opinion to share, despite being on the quieter side in class-wide discussions. Even when he had his head on his desk and appeared to not be working and/or reading, he always came to attention once group discussion began. He has a great sense of humor that works well in a group dynamic and makes his extremely likable. Ms. Jones said that Jacob was a good candidate to move up to level 3 (above 87%) by the end of the year. Jacob's silliness played a big role in his interaction with others and within the bookclubs. It was great to see him find a space where he could be funny *and* productive. For him, bookclubs served as an example for what reading could be—as opposed to what he thought it was, which has largely negative connotations. Before bookclubs, he wasn't particularly excited about reading, but through is own positive experiences with the clubs, his attitudes shifted.

Katie (level 3 on STAAR benchmark; participated in bookclubs; F&P level: Z)

Katie has been on level 3 the whole year. She is an advanced reader and enjoys series books, especially *Harry Potter*. Katie tends to be on the shyer side, but through her reading behavior, she has found a group of girlfriends to share her love of books with. They have positioned themselves as the "high" group of readers in the class. Lupe's confidence has changed dramatically over the course of the year. Her desire to express herself and talk about books has

come out as a result of increased book reading. Katie is a "more well-rounded reader who is able to say 'I like this book because' and really express that," said Ms. Jones. Her group of friends have "nerdy conversations about the books. You can tell they are deeply interested and deeply understanding," Ms. Jones went on to say. Katie is a lot less shy due to the presence of books in her life.

Alex (level 3 on STAAR benchmark; participated in bookclubs; F&P level: Z)

Alex, like Katie, has been on level 3 all year. Alex was adamant about working alone instead of participating in bookclubs before the unit started. Ms. Jones said "it's been interesting to have to see him engage in a group setting because he generally hates groups. He asked at the beginning of bookclubs to not be in a group and then decided to join them because they were reading the book he wanted to read." Ms. Jones observed him grow throughout the course of year in the ways he shares the information he knows, too. He is learning to share his thoughts more respectfully and be more open to discussion and collaboration. During bookclubs, I watched him learn how to be a group member instead of a solitary student. Alex navigated the space between the student he was naturally inclined to be (full of interruptions, stubbornness, and frustration, for example) with social conventions, like politeness. Ms. Jones noted that Alex found different ways to share the information he knows. "He's found a much different way to engage with them which is super awesome. I'm really proud of him for that."

Lola (level 2 on STAAR benchmark; participated in bookclubs; F&P level: V)

Lola, according to Ms. Jones, worked very hard to be on level 2 [on her benchmark]. She wasn't on level 2 when she started in fifth grade—therefore, earning the chance to participate in bookclubs came as an unexpected surprise to her. Her genuine surprise and excitement about her achievements and growth throughout the year translated to her active participation during her bookclub. During bookclub discussion, she spearheaded the discussions for her group. She kept her and her partner on track and was usually the first one to ask questions or share an opinion. Occasionally, though, Lola's silliness got her in trouble. On days when she was prone to goofing off, her teacher had to remind her to focus and be respectful. At times, this goofiness led her to be distracted within her bookclub.

III. Student Reading Surveys

Reading Survey #1

To collect first-person information on student literacy behavior, I distributed weekly reading surveys (see Appendix A for survey protocol). The first reading survey focused on how literacy materials were chosen and purchased. Questions such as "What types (genres) of books do you like reading?" and "how do you pick a new book?" were asked. Overall, parents/ guardians were cited as being the vessels through which books were purchased and disseminated. Almost every survey answer to the question "who buys/gets your books for you?" was answered with a parent, grandparents, or other family member, indicating the importance of parent/family involvement in literacy development. The Austin Public Library and Progress charter school's library were also listed as a place where these students got their books. The word "interesting"

was used quite frequently to describe a quality students looked for when picking out a new book. Some

Some students had a good understanding of the different genres of books available to them and were able to articulately describe why a particular genre of book appealed to them most:

"I look for my favorite genre with anything that seems [interesting]."

"I make sure the books are interesting and not too hard and not too easy."

"I read the first page to see if it grabs my interests. Then I read the blurb because sometimes the blurb makes me make a mistake and choose the wrong book."

These survey answers demonstrate the complex and nuanced conception of book choice that 10 year olds come to class with and spend the rest of the year (and their lives) developing further. Students also had a good understanding of how to choose a text that was appropriate for their respective reading levels, which also highlights a level of self-awareness that I wasn't expecting to find among 10 year olds. Some other notable answers from the first survey included using the "5-finger rule" when choosing a new book, reading the synopses on the back of the book, and looking for books that come highly recommended. One student lets her friends pick her books for her sometimes.

Reading Survey #2

Reading survey 2 focused on different forms of literacy. I wanted to get an idea of the types of literacy materials kids consumed in and out of class. When asked what types of materials they liked to read besides books, an overwhelming number of students answered with

magazines and online content. Digital forms of reading were less common, but when it did happen, they took place on Kindles, iPads, and computers. One of the questions on the survey asked if students read the same or different books as their friends. This was included to see how much of a role socialization and relationships played in the book-choosing process. To my surprise, though, there wasn't a consensus on this question. A lot of students had certain books in common with their friends, but also chose different texts that aligned with their interests and/or reading level. Students were aware of this, too, writing things like:

"I read different books as my friends because we all like different genres of books."

"I read different books than my friends because I am either at a higher reading level than them or a lower reading level than them."

Some students demonstrated self-awareness regarding the book choice process:

"I read some of the same books as my friends so that we can get together and talk about it."

"Yes, I do read the same books as my friends because they persuade me to read it."

"Sometimes [books] interest me and sometimes [my friends] recommend them to me."

While there was no consensus on whether friend recommendations and book preference influenced individual book choice—it varied from student to student—it was clear that these fifth graders possessed a well-developed understanding of what made their book choice(s) unique. The answers from this survey showed me that finding a new book was an inherently social activity. Whether it was through friends, family, or technology, these students relied on other sources besides themselves to select new texts.

Reading Survey #3

Survey 3 honed-in on individual attitudes toward reading. The purpose of this particular survey was to get first-hand information and opinions regarding my student population's feelings towards reading. This was a nice change of pace from my previous two surveys in that this one focused more on the emotional side of literacy development. The question "what does reading mean to you?" received a variety of different answers. Some students took the question quite literally while others went for a more conceptual approach. Students were more or less split into two categories based on how they interpreted this questions. On the more literal side of the spectrum, students answered this question with responses like:

"Looking at words and understanding what they mean."

"Reading means to enjoy what you read and understand it."

"Reading means to see words and want to know what they say or what story they are telling."

"Reading a book."

"Reading means to read a book and enjoy it."

Other students viewed reading as a transformative experience, citing words like "adventure" and "imagination" quite frequently:

"[Reading means] being in whole different place."

"Reading to me means a way to travel and have adventures in your mind."

"[Reading] means a place where I can relax my mind."

"What reading means to me is a journey because when I read something that I like I feel like I'm inside the book."

The idea of reading as entertainment also came up multiple times, indicating that students have created a link between pleasure and reading:

"[Reading is] very special and entertaining."

"[Reading is] fun-ness."

"Reading is entertainment and escape."

While most of the answers for this question were straightforward, when asked about whether they liked reading or not, students had mixed responses. Students enjoyed reading for numerous reasons. Some of the themes I observed within their answers included:

- to provide a sense of escape and exploration into unknown worlds
- to make students feel relaxed, take their mind off of things, and/or be entertained
- because they make the student feel happy, important, and/or a sense of fun
- because reading is interesting and has content that appeals to its reader

Interestingly enough, almost all of the students that were on the fence about reading provided answers that displayed some form of conflict surrounding the reading and book choice process. A lot of students made the connection between not being able to choose the right book and therefore, not liking reading. However, these exact same students often answered a sentence later that they do like reading when the book is, as one student put it, "just right."

What I found most interesting about this particular set of answers were the students' conceptions of what it meant to not "like reading." To them, not liking certain books was equivalent to not liking reading. Student answers included:

" I like reading sometimes because when I find a book I am interested in I get to use my imagination. But sometimes I don't because there [aren't] many books I like."

"I think reading is okay because I'm interested in most of the books that I read."

"I kinda like reading because some books don't have the stuff that I like. And some do have the stuff that I like."

"I kind of like reading because I don't know what kind of books I like (I just read)."

"Kinda, I just can't find books I like."

These quotes are marked with significantly less enthusiasm than the aforementioned responses, insinuating a connection between this type of self-defined reading behavior—one that is filled with indecision and unsureness—and reader identity. These students' attitudes on what categorizes a person who enjoys reading, though, might very well have a negative effect on the way they view their own literacies. However, just because these students weren't interested in a certain book or books, doesn't mean they can't be categorized as someone who enjoys reading in general. When kids have the skills to find books they like and choose them on their own, they are much more likely to enjoy reading. If students are also empowered to choose their own books based on what is appropriate and on-level for them, they can have ownership over the book-choice process and in turn, mitigate some of the insecurity present in their current experience with book choice and reading.

The way students viewed themselves as readers ultimately affected their relationship with reading as a whole. The students who used words like "OK" and "not good but not bad," or labeled the act of reading as "not their favorite thing," were more likely to have less-favorable views towards reading. They were more likely than "reader positive" peers to have lukewarm attitudes towards reading. It should come as no surprise, then, that there was a strong correlation between the students who considered themselves "good," "strong," or "great" readers and the

likelihood of them labeling the act of reading as a positive experience for them. This implies that students who have positive reader identities are more likely to view reading in a positive light than their less confident peers. If educators can figure out ways to alter reader identity and shift reluctant readers towards more positive self-identifications, it follows that their attitudes towards the act of reading would be transformed positively, too.

Reading Survey #4

The purpose of reading survey 4 was to get concrete data on book titles, author names, and reading levels of students. I wanted to know what books and authors students on different levels enjoyed. Implicit in this was a hope that there would be discernible patterns between reading level and book choice. To find these patterns, I sorted the reading survey responses in four groups: students who self-reported as being on a high school reading level; students who self-reported being on a 4-6th grade reading level; students who self-reported being on a 6-8th reading level; and students who reported not knowing what level they were on.

By grouping the student responses in this way, I was able to see if there was a correlation between reading level and book choice. What I found, apart from some general connections between reading level and book choice, was evidence for the influence that series books have on adolescents' reading behavior. This group of students were entirely author and series-focused in their book selections. Authors like J.K. Rowling (*Harry Potter* series), Dav Pilkey (*Captain Underpants* series), Rick Riordan (*Percy Jackson* series), Rachel Renee Russo (*Dork Diaries* series), James Patterson (*Maximum Ride* series), and Jeff Kinney (*Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series) were all cited multiple times under the "what are you favorite books and authors" question.

The reoccurrence of these titles and authors makes a case case here for series books. Series books allow students to easily find books they will like by the same author and/or with characters they are familiar with.

Aside from the books students choose, I also noticed a determination to adhere to reading goals. For the students that responded they didn't know what reading level they were on, they still has goal levels they wanted to be on. Most of these types of responses included an aspiration to be on a fifth grade reading level or higher:

"I don't know what reading level I'm on. I hope to be on 5th grade or more."

"I don't know. I hope to be in 7th grade I guess."

"I hope to be past fifth grade 'cause I don't know what reading level I'm on."

"I don't know my level but I do hope I'm where I'm supposed to be. I hope to be on at least [a] 6th grade [level]."

These responses indicate how acutely aware students were of what it means to be reading "on-level" and what that type of goal achievement meant for their identity on the classroom. Each of these students wanted to be reading on their grade level or higher. Even when they didn't know what level they were currently on, they wanted to be on level (and certainly not below it) in the future. It's entirely possible that the students who didn't know their reading level were more concerned with where they thought they should be (i.e., on a fifth grade grade level) that where they actually were. Even for students who weren't on a fifth grade reading level yet, they still expressed desires to be on one or two grade levels higher than their current level. Most students cited, on average, a desire to grow their reading level by two-years.

In fact, every single student responded, regardless of their current reading level or what level they self-reported being on, that they'd like to grow more as a reader and be on higher reading level in the future. Within the context of this reader-centered classroom, this makes sense; however, it's important—and quite remarkable, actually—that not one student didn't have aspirations to grow as a reader over the rest of their time in school. Because Ms. Jones' class is build around reader empowerment, it should come as no surprise that every student had reading achievement goals set for themselves. But without this type of environment, it's possible that these students would have never been given the vocabulary label their literate behavior and goals, as well as the mindset to set reading goals for themselves and actually be empowered to achieve them.

In this class, students were made aware of their F&P levels and were constantly reminded of what their reading goals should be. The constant attention paid to reading and reader growth laid the foundation for a student population who was equally as concerned with those things. In this classroom, the goals of the teacher, the school, and the students were the same: to be a better reader.

Interview with Teacher

Teaching book choice was of great importance to Ms. Jones (see Appendix B for interview protocol). Student book choice varies from student to student. Ms. Jones noticed that her "higher readers have less of a pattern and are more adventurous in the types of books they read." For readers at lower levels, Ms. Jones noticed that they tend to find a genre they like and feel comfortable in and stick within that realm. These types of readers, she said, "tend to feel

frustrated more easily with books they don't immediately feel interested in from the first few pages," suggesting a link between reader persistence and reading level. Students on higher reading levels were able to persist more than their peers who were on lower levels, precisely because they were more comfortable and confident in their reading ability.

In terms of gender, the girls in Ms. Jones' class tended to love fantasy, suspense, and books with strong female lead characters. The boys tended to enjoy comics, manga, graphic novels, mysteries, and books about sports.

Ms. Jones enjoys teaching fifth grade reading because she views it as a fundamental course for middle school. The fifth grade teachers' goal is that 100% of their students leave 8th grade on reading level. With only 20% of the students entering fifth grade on or above reading level this year, this is, Ms. Jones, says, "a lofty goal." She went on to say:

> [Fifth grade reading] is honestly one of the most challenging courses to teach at our school because there is understandably a lot of pressure. The State of Texas mandates students be considered for retention if they do not pass Reading STAAR (although we can get waivers for students) in 5th and 8th grade, so our kids need a really strong start. Our goal is to build up our students and rewire their beliefs about reading. I want them to experience reading as a joy and not something to fail at again. If we can hook them in 5th grade it is a lot easier to keep them interested and motivated as material and texts become more challenging throughout middle school.

Chapter 5: Summary of Findings

My observations found that reading level was strongly tied to the attitudes students had towards their own reading ability. Book choices and reading behavior was also largely influenced by students' perceived reading ability. Stronger readers tended to have better, more favorable views of their own literacy and reading ability and therefore had more positive relationships with books. Reluctant readers were acutely aware of their self-proclaimed "deficits" and allowed this lack of confidence to negatively influence their relationship with books.

Books also positioned students socially. Students were often bound together by a mutual love of certain books. I also saw students try new books and book genres based off of what their friends were reading. Students used peer to peer recommendations to share books with their friends. Certain books united students together and gave them mutual ground to talk about the texts. In some cases, friendships were formed and strengthened by books. Mutual texts gave students things to talk about and bond over, which led to closer, richer relationships.

I didn't find any overwhelming evidence for a connection between bilingualism and book choice, despite my original intentions to do so with this project. The classroom libraries I saw didn't have many books in languages other than English, meaning reading in other languages and/or pursuing literacies in different languages was hard for students to do in school. The absence of books in other languages begs the question: what can teachers do to better support their students' literacy, specifically for Spanish-speaking populations? The inclusion of Spanish language books in a class library may help students maintain and strengthen their bilingualism. Bilingual texts may be leveraged to increase student literacy and reading proficiency, especially in reluctant bilingual readers.

Reader empowerment via goal setting was another big theme I saw in the classroom. At every turn, students were reminded of their personal reading goals. Students were encouraged to take ownership of their reading growth. They were given the skills through lessons and frequent teacher conferences to be able to achieve these self-imposed goals. Ms. Jones' classroom culture was a pro-reading one, which resulted in a reading-oriented student body. When surveyed, every student reported wanting to grow in their reading ability in some capacity, meaning that this particular reading-centered classroom became synonymous with student goal setting. Students were, for better or for worse, constantly reminded of where they were, where they needed to be, and how to get there. These messages pushed students to embrace their readernality and explore further into the literate world.

Gender also played a big role in students' readernality and book choice. While this was not the focus of my research originally, it became evident once I was in the classroom that boys and girls tended to steer towards different genres. The girls tended to read fantasy, suspense, and books with strong female lead characters. The boys chose comics, manga, graphic novels, mystery, and sports-themed books. There were, however, variations in these patterns as reading level increased. Students on lower reading levels found genres they liked and felt comfortable in and stuck with the books within those categories. These students were less adventurous than students on upper middle school and high school reading levels. Students on higher reading levels read with less of a pattern and were more adventurous in the types of books they read.

Everyone, regardless of their gender or reading level, read series books. Series books were popular in the classroom I observed in for a number of reasons. First, they allowed readers to grow alongside the series and develop their skills as readers. While characters and plot lines

remained the same, series book slowly progressed in difficultly, which allowed readers to hone their skills over the course of a book series. The consistency provided by series books made them more approachable, especially to reluctant readers. Series books also allowed reluctant readers to participate in the book choice process by providing a structure in which students could read one book and immediately find the next book in the series, without having to start the book choice process over again—a process that can be intimidating, and therefore, inaccessible for students at times.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

For the avid and successful readers, literacy seemed to play a major role in how they viewed themselves. In contrast, reading was not central for *some* students, generally the struggling, unsuccessful readers. My findings suggest that some classroom structures, like ability grouping and exclusion from bookclubs, might have contributed to to the negative reader identities of some of the lower-achieving students. In general, ability grouping should be avoided to prevent the creation of negative self-image, however, this is difficult, of course, when student success is determined by performance on standardized tests (which, in turn, teachers are expected to put emphasis on as well). Striking a balance between encouraging reader exploration without overlooking the importance of catching students who are not "on-track" to pass STAAR (or any state's standardized test) is important. Opportunities for student centered-reading and interaction should be available to every student, and not just the ones that have "earned" it. It is possible that the inclusion of everyone in bookclubs could help bring struggling and reluctant readers up a few reading levels.

Implications for practice include creating opportunities for students to explore aspects of their reading behavior. This can be done through daily free reading time (with an emphasis on Just Right Books and books that are relevant and meaningful to students), accompanied with peer-to-peer conversation and sharing. Educators and administrators should also create space in their curriculum for class-wide bookclubs—as opposed to ability-grouped bookclubs—where students can develop and explore new reading behaviors alongside their peers. Bookclubs create more opportunities for social reading and student-led literacy exploration, which in turn increases favorable attitudes toward reading.

Class libraries should also be a feature of every classroom. These libraries need to include a variety of books and book series in order to accommodate every type of reader. Trips to a local library are also a great way to increase student access to books, especially among populations of students whose parents can't always take them to the library because of time and transportation constraints. Economic constraints are also mitigated by library usage. Therefore, libraries trips (and the corresponding skills necessary to use them) should be embedded into the curriculum.

Class libraries also need to include texts in languages other than English. It is important to encourage students to read in Spanish and to provide access to books in Spanish so they can continue to develop their biliteracy.

Acknowledgement of Limitations

I am choosing to only observe one teacher at Progress Charter. I acknowledge that my study is based on charter school curriculum and not that of public schools. I do not have the time or the resources to conduct a long-term study on the curricular and instructional differences that

exist in a variety of classroom environments, but I am not making claims that Progress Charter does a better or worse job at addressing the needs of its students. I have also limited the population of my study to bilingual Hispanic students, age 11 to 12, because it is the population I am most interested in. Any results and claims made within this thesis are based on the understanding of the limited scope of this research and will be addressed as such. My aim was to simply observe and draw conclusions about the specific environment I observed in.

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Appendixes

Appendix A

Student Reading Surveys

Reading Survey 1

1. What types (genres) of books do you like reading? Why?

2. Where do you get your books from (the library, KACP, from a bookstore, other)?

3. How do you pick a new book? What qualities do you look for?

4. Who buys/gets your books for you (parents, grandparent, friend, other)?

Reading Survey 2

1. What else, besides books, do you like to read (magazines, newspapers, online content, etc.)?
2. Do you read in digital forms? If yes, what kinds (Kindle, iPad, computer, etc.)?
3. How do you hear about new books and/or books to read next?
4. Do you read the same books as your friends? Different ones? Why?

Reading Survey 3

1. What does reading mean to you?
2. Do you like reading? Why or why not? (it's OK if you're not a big fan of reading. Just explain why!)
3. What is easy for you when you read?
4. What is hard for you when you read?
5. How would you describe yourself as a reader?

Reading Survey 4

1. What are you reading now? How do you like the book?

2. What are your favorite books? Authors?

3. What reading level are you on? What level do you hope to be on?

Appendix B

Teacher Interview

Interview 1

1. How are reading levels initially assigned to students?

2. How do students learn about what their reading levels mean? How do they use these levels to pick books?

3. Is book choice taught in your classroom? If yes, how? Can you detail that process?

4. How do students move up in reading levels? Is that monitored by the teacher or is it self-monitored?

5. What observations do you have, if any, about bilingual students and their reading habits/ behaviors? Are they different from the English-only students? The same?

6. Can you explain how sheltered instruction for ELLs works?

7. What patterns, if any, have you observed in student book choice and literacy decisions (i.e., what girls read, what boys read, who reads Harry Potter, who reads sports books, etc.)? How would you describe student book choice (predictable, unexpected, fulfilling a pattern, etc.) as they relate to the patterns described in question 6?

8. Can you explain how the book club unit works? How are groups/books chosen? What was the rationale behind it?

9. Is there free-reading time in your class? Or some variation on it? How does it work? How have you seen it change (or not change) student attitudes toward reading?

10. How long have you been teaching? How long at KACP?

11. What drew you to ELA? If I recall it was somewhat random, so if that's true, what did you end up loving about the subject?

12. What are your beliefs on reading and literacy? How do you translate/incorporate these beliefs into your classroom?

13. What keeps you teaching ELA, as opposed to a different subject? What are some of your fundamental beliefs about the purpose of a 5th grade ELA class?

14. Can you, in your own words, describe each of the students you chose for this study? Why did you think they would be a good match for this project? What made them stand out to you? How have you seen them change throughout the year?

15. What does the "Michigan" STAAR benchmark paper on the Brag Board with percentages hanging in your classroom indicate? What levels are the students chosen for this study on and what does that tell you about them?

16. Can you describe the LPAC in your own words? How do you use these scores and how do they dictate your classroom environment/teaching behavior, if at all?

Appendix C

Classroom Documents

Reading Log

Name _____ Date: February 27th, 2017 Grade: _____

Powerful Readers Reading Log ☺ #9

Directions: You must read at least **30 minutes a night** at least **SIX (6) nights a week** for a total of 180 minutes. After you read and **complete a writing prompt,** a parent/guardian must **sign** your reading log.

	The Basics	Writing Prompt	Parent Signature
Monday 9.1	Title: Author: Start Time: End Time: Start Page: End Page:	**Summarize**: Use BME or CCR to summarize the pages you read below. You must include "**In the beginning, In the middle, In the end"** or **"The characters, the conflict and the resolution"**.	Minutes Read:
Tuesday 9.2	Title: Author: Start Time: End Time: Start Page: End Page:	**Make a Prediction:** Write a detailed predication for the next ten (10) pages of your book. Make sure your prediction is at least three sentences long.	Minutes Read:
Wednesday 9.3	Title: Author: Start Time: End Time: Start Page: End Page:	**Summarize**: Use BME or CCR to summarize the pages you read below. You must include "**In the beginning, In the middle, In the end"** or **"The characters, the conflict and the resolution"**.	Minutes Read:

Thursday 9.4	Title: Author: Start Time: End Time: Start Page: End Page:	**Character Study:** Who is the main character of your story? What is she/he like? What challenges is she/he facing? How is he/she changing? ***Write at least 3 sentences describing the main character.***	Minutes Read:
Friday 9.5	Title: Author: Start Time: End Time: Start Page: End Page:	**Summarize**: Use BME or CCR to summarize the pages you read below. You must include "**In the beginning, In the middle, In the end"** or **"The characters, the conflict and the resolution"**.	Minutes Read:
Saturday Or Sunday 9.6	Title: Author: Start Time: End Time: Start Page: End Page:	**Visualize:** In ***at least three sentences***, describe the setting of the section you just read. Then, draw a detailed picture of it.	Minutes Read:

Total Pages_____ Total Minutes_____

Literature Circle Norms Worksheet

Our Literature Circle Norms

Discuss as a team what you believe should be the rules/norms for your meetings and the way you will interact.

1. _____
   _____
2. _____
   _____
3. _____
   _____
4. _____
   _____
5. _____
   _____
6. _____
   _____

Make sure that everyone agrees and then present your norms to Ms. Jones!

We agree to abide by the norms we have created in order to enjoy this book fully and grow as teammates.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

Appendix 4

Home Communication

Scholastic Book Order Home Communication

January 5th, 2017

Dear Parents of 2024,

Sometimes all it takes to help your child learn to love reading is a Just Right Book. A Just Right Book is a book that is on their reading level and very interesting to them. Reading Just Right Books is the best way for your student to grow their reading level this year. We have a grade-wide goal for each student to make at least two years of reading level growth during the 2016-2017 school year.

There are many ways that the reading teachers and families at KACP are working to support our students in growing their reading level:

- students are reading between 75-90 minutes during school hours
- students have access to our classroom libraries.
- we take monthly field trips to the Austin Public Library
- Families encourage students to read at home for 30 minutes or more a night.

We would like to provide a new opportunity to both support your child in reading Just Right Books and helping to bring new books into our classroom libraries. Starting after Thanksgiving Break, students will have the opportunity to order books from the Scholastic Book Club catalogues. These books are brand new, high-interest books at a lower cost than most retailers (such as Barnes and Noble). Ordering a new book would be a great gift or reward for your student! Students will receive a catalogue in class each month and will be told the DUE BY date for any book orders for that month.

There are two options to place a Scholastic Book Club order:

Order Online-

1. Register at: https://clubs.scholastic.com/home
2.Click "Parents – connect to your teacher!"
3. Enter the Class Activation Code: P43R4
4. Click "Create Your Account"
5. Choose Just Right Books for your student from thousands of options!
6. Submit the order online and wait for your books to come in

Order by Catalogue-

1. Review the paper catalogue your student sends home to find Just Right Books!
2. Fill out the order form at the back of the catalogue.
3. Place the correct amount of cash and change, or a check made out to KIPP AUSTIN COLLEGE PREP in the envelope, and seal the envelope.

4. Have your student bring the envelope to Ms. Jones by the DUE DATE.
5. Your student will receive a receipt for the money sent in and Ms. Jones will send in the orders.
6. Wait for your books to come in!

All orders will be delivered to the school and I will pass out the books to students immediately. By ordering through the teacher book club, you are also helping us to earn points towards free books for students to use in our classroom! We hope that you will be able to take advantage of this opportunity. Please reach out if you have any questions!

Our first order will be due on January 19th, 2017 If you are ordering by catalogue please send your book choices and payment by this date.

Thanks,
Ms. Jones

Reader Workshop Home Communication

August 19th, 2016

Dear Parents and Guardians,

Welcome back to school, and welcome to Reader's Workshop! My name is Ms. Jones, and I am excited to help your son or daughter to become a stronger, more passionate reader. As you know, the ability to read well gives us power and choice in life, and I want your child to have a life of opportunity.
Here is how you can help me accomplish this big goal:

1. **If you do not have one already, get your child a public library card, and visit your local library as often as you can. <u>All students must have active public library cards by September 5th, 2014, as we will be visiting public libraries for field lessons throughout the year.</u>**
2. **Make sure your child comes to school each day with a book that she/he loves to read.**
3. **Make sure your child reads every night at home, ideally, for 30 minutes or more. Help him/her make a quiet, comfortable space to read.**
4. **Read with your child often and let him/her read to you or another family member.**
5. **Talk to your child about her/his books. Find out what she/he likes to read. Books make great birthday and holiday gifts!**

I look forward to serving your family. Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Ms. Jones
5th Grade Reading Teacher, Progress Charter

Author Biography

Olivia Berkeley came to the University of Texas at Austin in the fall of 2013 and thought she knew what she wanted to do. She was wrong. After a few twists of fate, Olivia decided on studying English and Secondary Education while being a part of the Plan II Honors Program. She graduated in the spring of 2017 and plans to begin teaching in Houston in the summer.